



EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET SPELLINGS

August 27, 2008
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer
Janet Heininger

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TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET SPELLINGS

August 27, 2008

Heininger: This is an interview with Secretary Margaret Spellings, on the 27th of August, in Washington, D.C. Why don't we start with the iPod. We understand that you gave him an iPod after he was diagnosed.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: Would you tell us about it?

Spellings: Yes. Well, you know, he's the consummate "man who has everything," and I wanted to send him something that I thought he would think was fun and funny. So I sent him an iPod with a selection of various songs that were upbeat, a little bit political, a little bit funny, from "God Bless Texas" to—what's that Beatles song, "Try to see it my way..."—"We Can Work It Out." Another one was "You've Got a Friend." And I'll get you the thank you note that he sent, because this is consummate Ted Kennedy. The last one was, "Oo-ooh, child, things are going to get easier,... things are going to get brighter,... Some day, we'll put it together and we'll get it all done." Anyway, it was just a funny collection of about 20 or so songs. I've talked to him since. He thought it was funny. So he sent me this thank you note back, with some of the titles of the songs in the thank you note, and it's just darling.

Heininger: And you know he listened to it.

Spellings: Yes, oh definitely, or some very able staff person did.

Heininger: No, my guess is he listened to it.

Spellings: I think he did.

Heininger: Yes, he listened to it.

Spellings: When I talked to him about it he said, "Well thanks for the—" He's a little bit old fashioned too, as you know, and he said, "Well, thanks for the jingles." [*laughter*] And he said, "Does the President know you have these musical production skills?" or something funny like that. And I said something like, "I don't think he does." Anyway, it was just for fun.

Heininger: So what had your relationship been with him that would lead you to the point of sending him an iPod like that? It had obviously been pretty close.

Spellings: Yes. I just admire him so much as a fellow public servant. Obviously, we're on different sides of the aisle, clearly, but he's just so honorable to work with. He tells you what he'll do and what he won't do, and he's just an easy person to work with. I know it hadn't always been like that, and for some reason we connected eight years ago, and he's been particularly generous and good to me professionally. He's just a good human being. I don't know how that really happened, why it is that we got along. Maybe he doesn't think much of others in the *Administration*.

Here's the thank you note that you'll get a kick out of. And here's the song list.

Heininger: Oh, my.

Spellings: But the thank you note is funny. "I love the songs. You've got a friend in me, don't worry, be happy, because I have high hopes that we can work it out. I feel good...." That was one of them. "What a wonderful world..." etc.

Heininger: He wrote that and he listened to all those songs.

Spellings: So there are the songs.

Heininger: "You've Got a Friend", by James Taylor, "Survivor" by Destiny's Child. So did you download these yourself?

Spellings: Well, I came up with the list and I had a helper who is much better in technology. "I Feel Good", James Brown, that's a good one.

Heininger: "Don't Worry, Be Happy."

Spellings: "Irish Eyes."

Heininger: "Irish Eyes are Smiling."

Spellings: "God Bless Texas."

Heininger: "What a Wonderful World." Oh, that's wonderful.

Spellings: Anyway, I thought he got a kick out of it.

Heininger: That's exactly the kind of thing that he would appreciate.

Spellings: Exactly. You know, you can't go out and buy him a Hermes tie or something like that.

Heininger: No, that wouldn't—

Spellings: Yes. I just admire the guy as a public servant. I used to say, and still think this way, but people ask me about [President George W.] George Bush and Ted Kennedy. These are two people who incite a lot of emotion with people. They're kind of larger than life characters, but they're here for the right reason. They're here to do good and do right. Ted Kennedy is not here to get rich or to be loved. Being loved probably happened with some core people. He's also

hated by some, too, I guess. He's here because he believes in public service and he believes in doing good for the people that he serves. That's why I'm here, too. We don't always agree, but you see so much in Washington about people who are feathering their nest or getting the son-in-law a contract, or want to run for this or that higher office—all these angles, and he's just a great public servant. I admire him.

Heininger: When you were in Texas, and therefore you were looking at him from a distance, what did you think of him then, before you came here?

Spellings: I was a Republican legislative staffer, worked at my state party, and I'd get direct mail pieces with Ted Kennedy as the lead—you know, we've got to stop Ted Kennedy from whatever. So I didn't think anything about him except as sort of a brand for the other side.

I was stunned when I came here. I met him very early on in the process. In fact, I was present—and probably Sandy [Barnett A. Kress] talked about this because we were both there—at the first meeting, the first substantive meeting that Bush and Kennedy had on No Child Left Behind. The tone was *Are we going to get it done and do we trust each other? Am I for real?* It was a kind of weird mating dance. And it was interesting to be present for that. So I met him in that process, only having known what I knew from direct mail and the larger than life aspects of Ted Kennedy.

He was very good to staff. He engaged himself in so much stuff, grinding through the details of things. He knows the stuff. He's not one of these members who sort of flies over—I mean, he has very definite opinions about what he wants, and then he also has great staff. I'm not taking anything from them. Anyway, I knew I was going to get to know him because he was so involved in the process.

Heininger: Did he surprise you at that first meeting? Was he what you had expected?

Spellings: I could tell right then and there that he wanted to do right and do good, and he had faith in George Bush. This is eight years ago. He had faith in George Bush, he had faith in our process. He wanted to get this done. This piece of legislation, the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act], had languished for years, five or six years, and he saw an opportunity. He saw an opportunity to meet some of the things that were in his mission: more money for schools, focus on the achievement gap. George Bush had said he was a different kind of Republican. He was unique in that he was a Republican who was talking about education around the needs of poor kids and was not wanting to abolish the Department of Education the way that every other Republican President had. So I think Kennedy saw an opening, and obviously Bush did also, so there was some mutual interest and common cause.

Heininger: Now there had been a meeting before that one, there had been one in Austin that George Miller was at but Kennedy was not at.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: When you all were sitting there in Texas, getting ready to come to Washington, did you expect Kennedy to play the role that he ended up playing?

Spellings: I didn't think anything about it. All I knew was that Ted Kennedy was public enemy number one for Republicans, and somebody, Judd Gregg or the staff or somebody had decided that we weren't going to invite Ted Kennedy to this meeting. It wasn't as if he accidentally couldn't come. I think he wasn't invited, period.

Heininger: Right.

Spellings: That was completely consistent with the idea that he's the bad guy. Fast forward eight years and he's the biggest asset that No Child Left Behind ever had, period.

Heininger: This has got to have come, I would assume, as a surprise to you, sitting there in Texas, which had had quite a reform history in education, knowing you're coming in with a President who had a big education reform agenda.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: And public enemy number one is not who you would expect.

Spellings: Exactly. It was a shock.

Heininger: To be the one that you're going to end up working with.

Spellings: It didn't take long to figure out that here were the keys to the kingdom. You know Ted Kennedy. In the first 15 seconds, you can tell that he's a guy with a heart and with a commitment. You could tell watching TV two nights ago, that that's him. I'm going to start crying.

Heininger: This is what we have found in talking to people over and over again, particularly those who come to Washington with one view of him that is shaped by what the public image is.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: That they get to know him and realize that that's not the whole picture.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: That's not the whole picture. But on something like this, which was so critically important to George Bush when he first came in, it had to have come as a huge shock.

Spellings: Yes. But again, I think it was almost a mating dance between the two of them at the beginning—you know, *Do we trust each other?* Not to get overly dramatic, but the Bushes and the Kennedys are as close to anything like political legacies that we have.

Heininger: Dynasties.

Spellings: Political royalty or dynasties, in this country, and to see that relationship get planted, nurtured, mature, and see trust develop, is another part of the journey.

Heininger: So how did your relationship start with him? Did you start having direct contact with him?

Spellings: Yes, we had regular—and this is what’s so different now about the way things are, and of course these were the honeymoon days of the administration. And you do have to remember that this was 2001. A lot of people did and still do have what we in Texas call “sore tail,” over the whole election. It was a risk for us to—the whole climate was a little bit risky. Obviously, this is pre 9-11.

Heininger: Right.

Spellings: I was part of the transition. George Bush was a different kind of Republican. The Republicans were as nervous about this as the Democrats were. They must have been thinking, *What is he talking about, minority kids and inner city? Accountability?* This is a lot of the stuff that Hillary Clinton had talked about—I mean, [William J.] Clinton had talked about some of this stuff, so there was some nervousness.

Of course, we had actually done this policy in Texas. The first week of the Bush Administration looked like this. We had five days of education events. We started out with an Oval Office event, with the so called big four Kennedy, [James] Jeffords, [John] Boehner and Miller. Of course, we lost the Majority somewhere in there, and there’s a saga there. So that was the first day. We had a visit to a school. I can’t remember all five of them, but three of the things were the Oval Office meeting, a visit to an inner city school with the four of them in a van with the President, and then we had a movie night at the White House. Have you heard about this?

Heininger: No.

Spellings: Well, this is far afield, but on one of the nights in the first week of his Presidency, the Bushes hosted a key group of people, including the big four and maybe some spouses—it was less than 20 people—for hot dogs and popcorn at the White House movie theater. The movie was *Thirteen Days*, which, of course, is about JFK [John F. Kennedy]. And here we are, literally feet from the Oval Office, and George Bush and Ted Kennedy are sitting in the front of the White House movie theater watching *Thirteen Days*, and I was thinking, *What the heck am I doing here?* It was surreal.

Heininger: Good old Washington.

Spellings: All of these things that particular week were about this trust developing, this mating dance, this relationship, this common cause of getting something big done. They both had their own equities obviously, politically and otherwise, but they both believed that we ought to do a better job of educating poor kids.

Heininger: So how did it work out?

Spellings: Well, we passed this major piece of legislation, 87-10 in the Senate. I was a domestic policy advisor at the time and was so for four years. I can’t think of anything other than the resolution to pardon the turkey or something like that, that was as bipartisan, as strong, on such a far reaching piece of legislation. It was like 480-something to—it was a huge margin. Bush

brought the Republicans along, and they were somewhat reluctant suitors. [Thomas] DeLay was there at the time, and you know the whole Boehner/DeLay thing. The politics were just a whole—you know, you could write a whole book about that. And Kennedy is still the ultimate go to guy. If Ted Kennedy says it, it's so.

Heininger: Was it easier to deal with the Senate than it was to deal with the House, to get No Child Left Behind passed?

Spellings: I don't know. Not necessarily, because of the whole Jeffords thing and 9-11. We had to pick up the pieces after 9-11 and all of that.

Heininger: Well, in fact, they were on the floor during 9-11.

Spellings: Yes. We had weeks of debate.

Heininger: And then anthrax.

Spellings: And then anthrax, and so no, I wouldn't necessarily say that. None of it was easy. In retrospect, I think *How in the hell did we ever get it done?* Of course, I was from the state legislative environment. I was used to my pieces of legislation passing fast, so I thought, *What's the holdup?* But little did I know—

Heininger: This was very fast for Washington.

Spellings: Very, and as far reaching as it is.

Heininger: Let's talk a little bit about what had happened in Texas. Tell me a little bit about how you were involved in education reform in Texas, and how that shaped what Bush brought with him to Washington in terms of substantive policy.

Spellings: I worked for him the entire time he was Governor and to make a long story short, we had kind of incubated it at the state level, as had Jim Hunt, the Democrat Governor in North Carolina. There were some Governors around the country who were starting to do policy around closing the achievement gap, measuring every kid every year, disaggregating data, holding ourselves accountable in much more powerful ways than what I call the aspirational approach of putting the money out and talking nice about poor people and hoping for the best. We were trying to go to the next level, which causes a lot of pain and pinch and anxiety in teachers' unions. You know, everybody comes out of the woodwork.

It had had some success, and it had some success not only in Texas, but in North Carolina and other states. People were paying attention, including some to whom Kennedy listens a lot, like Ed Trust, and some of the civil rights organizations were watching some of this stuff. So I think it was attractive. It was sort of a "Nixon goes to China" in the policy, in that they had to have a Republican to help get focused better on poor kids. Anyway, it was a unique planetary alignment. I had worked for Bush for six years in the Governor's office, developing and implementing these policies that later became kind of a national model for No Child Left Behind.

Heininger: How did Bush differ from Clinton, in terms of his approach on education?

Spellings: Well, he obviously had to worry less about the “blob,” in particular, the teachers’ unions. They’re traditionally supportive of Democrats, as you know. So he was somewhat free of that and he could be more hawkish on accountability than Clinton ever could.

Heininger: I mean accountability. When Clinton came in, accountability didn’t even exist.

Spellings: Well, let me tell you something. When Bush got here, there was a lot of rhetoric in the existing law that had some assessment. Ten or eleven of the states in the country complied with the pretty anemic statute. They were just given waivers and it wasn’t real. It was all talk—all “blow and no go,” like we say.

Heininger: So what Bush wanted to do when he came in was to put teeth into it.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: So he comes in and he wants to do No Child Left Behind. How did it differ from what Clinton had been doing—because when Clinton came in there hadn’t been anything like standards, there hadn’t been anything like accountability.

Spellings: No, there was no real meaningful accountability.

Heininger: ESEA, as you say, was for aspirational. You put money into—

Spellings: School uniforms, cute little this and that—you know, try, hope, send money, that’s it.

Heininger: So Bush comes in and what is it that he wants to do?

Spellings: Get real meaningful accountability.

Heininger: And what did accountability mean in terms of what you were going to ask the states to do?

Spellings: Annual assessment, disaggregated data, give them a deadline to get there, I mean *every* kid. That is the essence of No Child Left Behind, and of course, that’s what we had to have, that is what No Child Left Behind is about. So all this talk about choice and what role did it play and did we negotiate it away too early—we have choice in here. It’s part of the consequences for when schools fail. Only Washington people thought that without school vouchers No Child Left Behind isn’t worth signing. That might be their opinion, but what we needed was accountability for poor kids.

Heininger: Where did you see Kennedy fitting into this? When you got into the substance, where did you see that he agreed with Bush and where did he not agree with Bush? How tough was he willing to be?

Spellings: I think he was going to be and has continued to be willing to be very strong on accountability, even to the extent that it offends teachers’ unions and some of the education status quo types, but he wasn’t willing to be vigorous about some of the more Republican-type notions of school choice and things like that.

Heininger: What you're also saying is that when it came down to it, there were basically three things that you really thought had to get in there, and Kennedy was in agreement with those.

Spellings: Yes.

Heininger: And that's what made the partnership work?

Spellings: Yes, fundamentally. We all had to put other stuff on, to lift the policy. They cared more about the highly qualified teacher stuff, which basically is a way to kind of "rich up" teacher qualification so that we can "rich up" salaries. That was a George Miller/Ted Kennedy kind of thing. We're about results. If we could get great results with people who didn't have strong credentials, I guess that would be fine with me. Whether that happens or not, it's just in the abstract. Of course, the Republicans would like to have school vouchers. We have something short of that in the law now. The essence of the bill was the accountability. That was and still is the core dimension, but there are other things that are important. I'm not saying that they're not important, but they're the nice-to-haves, not the must-haves.

Heininger: And they weren't the crux of what made the partnership work.

Spellings: Exactly.

Heininger: Between Bush and Kennedy, to be able to get the bill passed.

Spellings: Right. And money. I mean money for Kennedy, obviously.

Heininger: And money, OK. Where did you find you had trouble dealing with Kennedy?

Spellings: This remains true, and not just on this piece of legislation, but generally, just moving the ball is a hard thing to do. He's kind of a tea leaf reader and he has so many other equities and so many personalities to manage, that it's easy to get stalled out on big things. Frankly, we were stalled out before 9-11. There was a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth everywhere, but after 9-11, there was a real vigor and commitment to getting this over the finish line, rolling up our sleeves and getting it done.

Heininger: Do you think it was important for both the White House and for Congress to be seen as making progress on something?

Spellings: Yes, definitely.

Heininger: So, in some ways it was almost fortuitous. Although awful what happened, it certainly helped.

Spellings: When I think about how weird—this is going to just sound "new-age" or something, but—all these kind of weird things happened, none of which you'd ever wish for necessarily. It all added up to this thing happening, so when I look back, it's more fragile and more unique and more special and more interesting than I thought at the time.

Heininger: Well, there's a momentum in Washington for what it takes to get something accomplished, and it takes a unique constellation of factors, and it can be on almost any given thing.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: You don't know what that constellation is going to be and you don't know what that timing is going to be.

Spellings: Yes. Kind of the back story.

Heininger: The back story is different for everything, but with big, important pieces of legislation, there's something that turns the tide. And in this case you had the right personalities and a constellation of events that it sounds like worked in favor of getting No Child Left Behind through.

Spellings: That's right.

Heininger: And commitment from both sides.

Spellings: And could we do it again exactly now? No, we couldn't.

Heininger: It usually happens only once.

Spellings: Right, yes, and we don't need two. *[laughter]* So anyway, it's been just a thrill and an honor and a treat, all of those words, to have had the opportunity to be part of it. I've learned a lot from him, just to see how he calibrates things. Communicating with the guy is a whole art form in and of itself, as you may know.

Heininger: Sometimes there are verbs missing.

Spellings: Yes, but you know where he's going. I don't know how to explain that to you.

Heininger: If you saw it written down, the conversations wouldn't—if you saw a transcript written down, you would go—

Spellings: What the hell is going on?

Heininger: But you understand it when you're engaging with him.

Spellings: Yes. And you have to know enough about what you're talking about.

Heininger: How did you find his staff to deal with?

Spellings: Excellent, the best on the Hill.

Heininger: I take it you didn't find that to be the case with the other staffs that you were having to deal with?

Spellings: Well, some people have better staffs than others. I can tell you other people who had good staff. Boehner's staff was good, Jim Jeffords' was not very good, etc., but Kennedy's is the best on the Hill. They're committed to him and they have a lot of authority and they're just excellent. He pays attention to them. He knows his business. He's, I'm sure, a joy to work for as a policy wonk.

Heininger: So you knew that if you were having to deal with one of his staff members and you were having to reach agreement on something, that if they cut a deal with you, you knew you could count on it?

Spellings: Yes.

Heininger: That's not always the case with a lot of people.

Spellings: Right. And the other thing about Kennedy's staff, and this is true to this day, is he has—you know, there are enough characters. Unlike other staffs, where there's kind of one point of entry and exit, there's always a foil in the Kennedy orbit. There's a good cop and a bad cop, there's a communications person and a whatever. There's another angle, which is I think much easier to work with than when a staffer says, "No, and don't you call back."

Heininger: You're right. When you've got multiple entry points and you know that they've all got clout, it's much easier to deal with than if you know there's one person. If they don't return those phone calls, you don't get anywhere.

Spellings: Yes.

Heininger: That's an interesting comment. I've not heard that from other people. I happen to know it's true, because I spent years on the Hill, too. But you're right. That's a very astute observation about this staff.

Spellings: And yet it doesn't seem to create disharmony in his organization. Obviously, part of your thing is about the Senate and how it works and how it can work and how it should work. Obviously, I'm a grown up staffer. One of the major reasons he's so effective is the people who are around him and who deal with the work on his behalf. Obviously, he's an excellent boss, excellent legislator, excellent policy person, excellent orator, knows the stuff. I'm taking nothing from him, but the way they are organized, the capability they have, the kind of common vision that they share is unique and works for him.

Heininger: And you don't have lone rangers there either.

Spellings: No. I think the Senate would work a whole lot better—the Congress would work a whole lot better if there were more of that kind of team. If I were a new Senator and had just been elected, I would want to figure out how I could model that kind of system.

Heininger: Well, he's had many years to practice it.

Spellings: Yes, no doubt about it.

Heininger: But it's a model actually, that goes back really to the beginning with him, we've found in talking to people all the way back. It's not something that took a long time to evolve. It's the way he operates.

Spellings: Thinks and works.

Heininger: It's the way he thinks and works, yes.

Spellings: And the other thing I've noticed about him and his staff is, of course, they're completely devoted to him, but he is so respectful of them. They are his partners. And Bush treats me like that, too. That's another dimension that I thought was—they're so similar in so many ways. I mean they are both stubborn and hardheaded as all get out, but there's just a kind of respect for—there's no hierarchy with either one of them. George Bush doesn't think he's better than I am, and Ted Kennedy doesn't think he's better than Carmel [Martin] or Roberto [Rodriguez] or Michael [Myers] or whatever. You know what I'm saying.

Heininger: But it's also clear that it works the way it does because that's the way he wants it to work.

Spellings: Right, definitely.

Heininger: I'm sure you didn't see that with some of the other members, House and Senate, as a model either.

Spellings: As political as people think Ted Kennedy is, I mean I think he's the most policy oriented person, even though his reputation is political. He's one of the least political in a legislative sort of way.

Heininger: He's a wonk.

Spellings: Yes, absolutely.

Heininger: He's a policy wonk, and that's something people don't really understand. He really is a policy wonk.

Spellings: And a legislator.

Heininger: And a legislator.

Spellings: He's a damned good politician.

Heininger: Right. So what was it like to deal with him when you had to, say, come and testify in front of him? How did your dealings with him that took place in meetings differ from how you had to testify in front of him?

Spellings: Well, of course, I never testified before his committee. It was all behind the scenes stuff until I came here, until I became the Secretary.

Heininger: But you've now subsequently done that.

Spellings: Yes.

Heininger: So how has that differed?

Spellings: This just tickles me. I cringe when he calls me “Madame Secretary.” I feel like saying, “Don’t call me that. I could be your granddaughter.” I can’t be his granddaughter, but you know what I mean. He’s so formal and respectful, and it’s the whole Secretarial/Senatorial whatnot, which is just odd, and it’s not kind of the relationship that we’d had previously. It hasn’t been confrontational and, frankly, I haven’t done very much of it, just sort of limited things, because he doesn’t really operate that way. I mean he’s not one to have a big—it’s not like the House these days, where there’s a dog and pony show and they trot you out. That’s just not how they work. They’ll have a field hearing. I’ve traveled with him to do some grant stuff and some local events, but he’s not one for showboating on C-SPAN.

Heininger: What’s it like when you go to Massachusetts with him?

Spellings: Oh, my God, it’s a happening. You can’t walk through the airport without greeting every person—my sister’s brother-in-law is your next door neighbor, all this sort of kind of thing, down home.

Heininger: It’s very different from what you get with most people around here. I mean, there isn’t a real sense of—

Spellings: Connectedness, both ways.

Heininger: He belongs to Massachusetts.

Spellings: And they belong to him.

Heininger: And they belong to him, yes.

Spellings: Absolutely. I think he gets great joy in that. I’m sure it was a great line in the speech, but you could tell that—I mean the other night at the convention—just what he got from that himself. That will keep him through multiple chemotherapy sessions, no doubt.

Heininger: And we watched him this winter, when he went back on the campaign trail with [Barack] Obama, and he just loved it. There are people who really thrive on that.

Spellings: It’s almost like show business or something, I guess.

Heininger: There’s a lot to be said for show business. In politics, you have to be a performer to a certain extent, and you have to really like—I mean there are similarities to show business. It’s kind of hard to put into words.

Spellings: I don’t know. I don’t think of Ted Kennedy as—I mean, sure he has a big ego. You can’t do this work if you don’t have an ego, but he’s not an egomaniac. There’s just something different about the way he receives adoration. It’s humble. There’s something humble about it.

He's not going through the Boston airport like I'm the big man on campus kind of thing. It's more familial or something. I don't know.

Heininger: As if he lacks an arrogance that you see in some other people?

Spellings: Yes.

Heininger: I know what you mean and it is different.

Spellings: It's not like he's Evita Peron or something kind of thing. It's somehow different from that.

Heininger: No, but he likes the contact with people, and he really knows names.

Spellings: Oh, God, yes. Absolutely.

Heininger: It's just mind boggling.

Spellings: The other thing I think people don't know is that he's as smart as he is, because he is not the most artful communicator. Obviously he's a great orator, but when you're just having a conversation with him, it's different.

I need to show you something. I was on vacation in Florida and I was looking in some antique store, and I found a *Life* magazine from—it was right before Chappaquiddick and it was the first interview after Bobby [Kennedy] had died, his brothers had died. It was the first public thing, and it was a puff piece on him that you'd enjoy seeing. I'm sure you have all this kind of thing, don't you?

Heininger: You know, actually we focus less on the documentation, unlike some other project, unlike archives. This is an oral history. This is really focused on what people's recollections are of him, rather than on what's in the documents. What we're trying to do is to go beyond what's in the written records and provide something that is not there in the written records. It's more about people's interactions with him, which you don't necessarily get from the written records, particularly since people don't write diaries any more.

Spellings: They can't.

Heininger: You can't write diaries any more.

Spellings: Because Ted Kennedy would void it all. *[laughter]* I know what I was going to say earlier, that he's very intelligent, just insanely smart, and that people who hear him talk on an interview or even on *60 Minutes* or something like that, and that sometimes awkward kind of communication, Massachusettsy, whatever—people might not think he's as intelligent as he really is. He knows the federal law backward and forward, and how it all grew up. He's just a walking encyclopeda.

Heininger: So tell me about how No Child Left Behind evolved. After it gets passed, what happened to his relationship with Bush, and in particular, how did their differences on Iraq affect their ability to work together on education?

Spellings: Well, I only have one part of the elephant on that story, so I don't know about how all the Iraq interactions developed, although I do remember Andy Card telling me a story one time about how Ted Kennedy was on a major league rampage that was over the top even for him. Andy called him and said, "Good Lord, Ted." Of course, they were big buddies from Massachusetts, Andy, our first Chief of Staff. I assume you've talked to Andy Card.

Heininger: We have a list that's this long.

Spellings: All right, well, you should if you haven't. Andy called him, to call him on it, to say this is just beneath you, it's unsenatorial, it's not befitting your stature, back off. The other thing about Ted Kennedy is that he'll admit when he's wrong often, or he'll come around. Anyway, so apparently that occurred. I just have little glimpses like that into the Iraq side of the story.

On education, Bush stayed strongest and it mattered a lot—the money—in that first budget year, and so there was the promise of more money. That happened for a couple of years, then obviously the war and other calamities, 9-11, etc., took over the budget. There were other equities—I guess I would say it like that—with respect to the federal budget, and Kennedy and Bush parted ways on some of the resource issues, needless to say. But that has not colored his support for the policy stuff. It has made it more difficult for him, on his side of the aisle, to say, "I told you we were getting something for something." I think Kennedy felt a little breached by the President with respect to saying, "I'd bring my Democrats if I could do something like that."

Anyway, I do think that Kennedy is somebody who can compartmentalize. You asked about the interaction between Iraq and education. I don't know for sure because I don't know about all the Iraq interaction, but I think he's a person who can compartmentalize lots of things and sort of change the channel. I don't think he thinks, *I'm pissed off about such and such, therefore I'm never going to pass your education bill*. He just doesn't think like that.

Heininger: No, but it did have an effect and it made less money available for funding No Child Left Behind.

Spellings: Clearly that's true, but unlike a lot of people up there who have an overall totals sheet—if this, then that, and if you don't—where it's one big mix, I don't think Kennedy thinks like that. And I'll tell you why I think that, because long after No Child Left Behind, here comes immigration. Bush and Kennedy were very close on that also. right in the big, fat middle of the Iraq War.

Heininger: Well, what matters most to Kennedy is getting things done.

Spellings: Absolutely. He understands better than anybody, these moments in time that create a climate to move something. Who's the cast of characters? What's the historical moment? And he can calculate whether or not this is the time to run a play on education, immigration, healthcare, whatever.

Heininger: I can see why you sent him the iPod.

Spellings: Why?

Heininger: Because it's clear you're very fond of him, that you've had a very good working relationship with him, and you really like him.

Spellings: I do.

Heininger: It's something that surprises people when they come to Washington and have to deal with him. We've talked to some of his own colleagues, who have commended the Senator.

Spellings: Orrin Hatch or people like that.

Heininger: Who have had very clear views of who he is and get there and go, well, that's—

Spellings: Right, that's not what I—

Heininger: That's only one piece of the picture, and he works with so many different people, for so many different things.

Spellings: Does he like being public enemy number one? Does he like that sort of mystique, the Kennedy mystique, or does he want the world to know the real Ted Kennedy?

Heininger: My sense is that he's very complicated. I guess as we all are, but the kind of pressures that are on him, the family pressures, the dynasty, the legacy pressures, the 45 years in the Senate, being the symbol of liberal issues—

Spellings: The liberal lion and all that.

Heininger: The liberal lion and everything, and yet what he really cares most about is getting things done, and he'll work with anybody to get things done. It's what's been so interesting to us in looking at this project.

Spellings: He's one of the most interesting characters I've ever met in my life, period, and complex. We're all going to die at some point, and when he leaves the Senate, whenever it is, and I hope it will be a long time from now, there will be an amazing chasm. There's just nobody else like him, and as an admirer, I think he's such a role model for everyone in public service.

Heininger: Have you dealt at all with Vicki [Reggie Kennedy]?

Spellings: Some, yes. She's a delight, and of course I've dealt a good bit with the family. Eunice [Kennedy Shriver] and Tim [Shriver] on the whole special ed and Special Olympic stuff, and Patrick [Kennedy], of course, is on the House side.

Heininger: Maria [Shriver].

Spellings: Maria, yes. They're all in this world, which is a good thing, too, and of course, he's (Senator Kennedy's) cross pollinating all of that at all times.

Heininger: Well, I think our best explanation for why the communication can be like this all the time is because he's had so many years and because he's such a policy wonk, he's absorbing things like a sponge, from everywhere.

Spellings: Right.

Heininger: And it all comes together at once and something will trigger something from here and something from there. It's really kind of extraordinary to watch him, isn't it?

Spellings: Yes. You know what I'd like to know more about is how he manages his time—what his day looks like, this kind of thing. No human being—this is not just stuff he sends to me. Every person that he meets when he walks through the airport has a whole stack of stuff like this, and just I'm some Republican from the Bush Administration.

Heininger: It's amazing.

Spellings: The point is, how you manage your life so that you can touch that much stuff, touch that many people, touch that much policy, move that much mail. I mean how does one person physically do it?

Heininger: And more importantly, manage to sail as much as he does.

Spellings: Exactly.

Heininger: Because that's what he really, really likes, that boat.

Spellings: There's a lot more to be said. Another interesting topic would be on 9-11. I was with the First Lady—we were with him when that all went down, so that's a whole other chapter. There's so much to be said. It's hard to know where to start and stop.

Heininger: Well, you've got another meeting here. I want to thank you for being so generous with your time.

Spellings: Absolutely. Thank you for doing this labor of love and work.

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